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EMOTIONS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (OPINIONS ON GERMANY IN EUROPE AFTER 2010)

1.

Regularly conducted surveys in many European countries concerning neighbouring countries and nations often include questions about mutual perceptions by individual societies. Many surveys result in “ranking lists” of the most or least popular countries, compiled on the basis of various criteria, which often copy existing national stereotypes – for example, when respondents are asked to say which qualities, positive or negative, they associate with a particular society. The seemingly unambiguous quantitative results of such questionnaires, which conceal – despite using scholarly methods – strong ideological and/or political motivation, give a certain picture of the reality, but at the same time they become a factor that strongly influences it – publication of the survey results means that new data, which also plays a role in shaping opinions, is introduced to the current debate. This is an extremely important mechanism in forming a *mental mapping*, i.e. a mental landscape of Europeans which illustrates their attitude towards individual countries of the continent or the whole European Union. The term “mental landscape” should be understood as a representation of geographical space in the mentality of a person or a social group, or the structure of that space in the perception of its actors. In the early 1980s Alan K. Henrikson gave a precise and comprehensive definition of the concept:

A mental map is an ordered but continually adapting structure of the mind – alternatively conceivable as a process – by reference to which a person acquires, codes, stores, recalls, reorganizes, and applies, in thought or action, information about his or her large-scale geographical environment, in part or in its entirety.¹

Interestingly enough, this American geographer and political scientist makes no direct mention of the emotional aspect in creating such a landscape. However, focusing on the “structure of the mind” allows us to extend somewhat the horizon of

¹ A. K. Henrikson, *The Geographical “Mental Maps” of American Foreign Policy Makers*, *International Political Science Review* 1980, No. 4/1, pp. 495-530, here p. 486.

possibilities with regard to the process of transforming perception. Mental geography, which is a result of perception and its conditioning at the same time, is largely a reflection of emotions – not so much of sudden and violent ones, but rather of fixed emotional states.

The aim of this paper is not to analyse survey results or the more or less worthy motives of those who commission or conduct them, but to outline deeper social structures and study the mechanism which leads to the creation of mental landscapes, and in particular their emotional dimension, i.e. *emotional maps*. The idea is to emphasise the status and role played by emotional states in international relations, as an important factor in contact between states and societies. In theory, emotions are not only psychological reactions of individual actors, but also a phenomenon that can be **collectively** passed on, suppressed, shaped and reactivated, as an element of politics, among other things. Taking into consideration the extensive interaction between social structures and actors, emotions emerge as social constructs stabilised by certain practices and consolidated within specific cultures in a broader, sociological sense of the term. Using the constructivist approach in the theory of international relations, as presented most methodically by Alexander Wendt in the late 1990s², I wish to propose an interpretative framework to address emotional phenomena in international politics, with particular emphasis on European affairs.

2.

Germany is undoubtedly the entity which arouses the strongest and most complex emotions in Europe (and elsewhere). After 1945, following several years of humiliating and brutal occupation, the dominant feelings towards Germany in Europe were fear, hatred, and sometimes a desire for revenge. The situation became even more complex in 1949 when two German states were created, a fact which was not without emotional consequences due to the propaganda of the socialist countries and because of the dominance of the western German state (the Federal Republic of Germany) over the eastern political regime (the German Democratic Republic). While some socialist countries of the so-called Eastern Bloc (e.g. Poland³ and Czechoslovakia) had some reservations and remained cautious in their relations with the GDR, the Federal Republic was most often the major focus for European fears of Germany and the Germans. The normalisation and reconciliation processes of the post-war and Cold War times slowly changed that, paving the way for more positive emotions as well as partnership and cooperation. The Cold War was both a suppressive and a stimulating factor, depending on which side of the Iron Curtain these processes were taking

² A. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge 1999. Polish translation: *Spoleczna teoria stosunków międzynarodowych*, transl. by W. Derczyński, Warsaw 2008.

³ See M. Tomala, *Przyjaźń z Niemiecką Republiką Demokratyczną, ale za jaką cenę?*, *Rocznik Polsko-Niemiecki* 3, 1994, pp. 59-75.

place. However, the most enduring emotion was fear and its variants – ranging from worry, anxiety, fearfulness and uneasiness to distrust and distance. Sometimes more noticeable and sometimes as if overcome and bygone, the emotions felt towards the German neighbour manifested themselves in different ways – in discussions on foreign policy or the lack thereof, social and media reactions, or discussions about Germany. There have been many examples of verbal and nonverbal fear of the Germans, and it is difficult to categorise them within a closed corpus of research.

Nevertheless, the overall trend shows that the emotional landscape of Germany has changed positively since 1945. The word “positive” does not carry a normative connotation here, and it is used only to emphasise the accepting attitude of one actor towards another.⁴ Recent years, which have passed overshadowed by currency and economic crises in the euro zone and the European Union, show that this process does not have to be irreversible. As was noted by the German weekly *Der Freitag* in 2011: “A certain country is again arousing fear.”⁵ The question is why precisely this crisis and the German approach to it revive old fears of the Germans, while at the same time these fears are not treated merely as a short-lived phenomenon, but rather as a culturally constructed theme corresponding to a certain **norm**.

3.

The collapse in the euro zone and its economic consequences for the entire Union and Europe triggered a specific reaction from the German authorities. The crisis came at a time when Germany held a strong international position, particularly as regards the size of the budget deficit, the market situation and foreign trade performance. A sharp contrast between its economic position and that of some other member countries of the EU and the euro zone, especially the countries of the PI[I]GS group (Portugal, Ireland, [Italy], Greece and Spain⁶), focused attention on the economic successes which were the result of reforms carried out in Germany for more than ten years and highlighted the deteriorating position of the countries of southern Europe. At the same time, since 2010 the government of Chancellor Angela Merkel had been telling EU partners that Germany would not be willing to keep paying for the mistakes of other countries.

⁴ See P.-F. Weber, *Timor Teutonorum. Angst vor Deutschland seit 1945: eine europäische Emotion im Wandel*, Paderborn 2015, pp. 181-229.

⁵ R. Misik, *Ein Land macht wieder Angst*, *Der Freitag* 24.11.2011, p. 1, <http://www.freitag.de/auto-ren/der-freitag/ein-land-macht-wieder-angst> (27.03.2015).

⁶ PI[I]GS, i.e. “Portugal, Ireland, [Italy], Greece, Spain”. This acronym, used for the first time by English-speaking journalists at the beginning of the global financial crisis after the scandal over the American bank Goldman Sachs, was later criticised for its obvious pejorative meaning in relation to the countries to which it refers. See J. von Reppert-Bismarck, *Why Pigs Can't Fly*, *Newsweek* no. 152, 7-14.07.2008, p. 46.

The dramatic socioeconomic situation in Greece required emergency action on the part of the so-called Troika (the International Monetary Fund, European Commission and European Central Bank), to which the German partner agreed gradually and not without seeking guarantees for itself, the Union and the European currency.

The reactions in the countries with a direct interest in untying the monetary-economic Gordian knot, as well as within other entities, were various.⁷ Some were an expression of fear of an emerging trend in relation to the growing influence of Germany on European affairs and amazement at its intention to abdicate its current role as the EU's main payer. Various public statements made by Greek and Italian or French politicians expressed such mixed feelings. Of course, they did not always indicate an identical attitude towards Germany, but they pointed to growing distrust. It is not possible to mention here all of the demonstrations by Greek citizens outraged and frightened by the German and EU requirements, or every statement by Greek politicians (not only from the extremist parties) which criticised the position of Angela Merkel as an example of selfishness and lack of solidarity. At the same time very sharp, often quite anachronistic and clearly exaggerated comparisons between today's German European policy and its behaviour towards Europe in the 1930s were numerous; for example, the German government was accused of taking advantage of its strong position to seek to gain power over the entire continent and impose its vision of Europe upon others. Similar, if somewhat less aggressive, attacks from France – traditionally Germany's most important European partner – were particularly surprising. Arnaud Montebourg, French Minister for Economic Regeneration (the name given to the French ministry of the economy in 2012–2014) from May 2012, said that Merkel was carrying out a policy reminiscent of the times of Bismarck, and that it was not without reason that she was described as the “Iron Chancellor.”⁸

In April 2013, Claude Bartolone, then President of the French National Assembly, said that France should stand up to the Germans, or even seek “confrontation” with German ideas on European affairs. Such opinions, when publicly expressed by prominent politicians, cause astonishment and perhaps a sense of helplessness, especially when they come from a country which together with Germany has run an exemplary policy of reconciliation and cooperation in Europe for half a century. What is the reason for the sudden dislike and distrust fifty years after the signing of the Elysée Treaty?

⁷ See M. Rice-Oxley, *Angela Merkel: saviour or tormentor? Europeans give verdict*, The Guardian 10.09.2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/10/angel-merkel-saviour-or-tormentor> (27.03.2015). The results concern France, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom.

⁸ See *Merkel comparée à Bismarck? Montebourg persiste*, Libération 01.12.2011, http://www.liberation.fr/politiques/2011/12/01/merkel-comparee-a-bismarck-montebourg-persiste_-778781 (27.03.2015).

4.

The problem of the negative perception of Germany in today's Europe can be viewed in terms of collective emotions. The distinction between the collective and cultural memories⁹ used in cultural studies can be applied to the discussion of emotions shared by many people or a national or language community. Social and political communication, as well as the time factor, play an important role here. Historical experience forms the basis for specific social emotions. Fear of Germany, such as in Poland after WWII and in the second half of the 1940s, was a posttraumatic experience of society as a whole, and this deep and common, in the social sense of the word, emotion did not disappear even though its cause had been eliminated. It remained in the collective memory and was transformed into a state of mentality. The process was facilitated by, among other things, verbalisation of various kinds: material, iconographic, scenographic and narrative.¹⁰ The erection of monuments, plaques bearing the names of victims of German aggression, annual state celebrations commemorating heroic deeds during the fight against the Nazis, historiography and historical policy regarding that period – all of these had the aim of reminding people of the danger that Germany had posed in the past. As a result of the social communication which is still taking place due to the aforementioned memory carriers, a specific collective emotional state is maintained and can even be passed to the next generation. In France, the ruins of the burned French village of Oradour-sur-Glane, where an SS unit killed almost all of the residents in June 1944, and which was left intact after the war,¹¹ served such a purpose.

If norms are, by definition, the result of specific social practices forming a stable culture, it must be assumed that the emotional states so preserved also have the status of norms. Even as the moment or period when the community was ruled by fear becomes more and more remote, specific stressful events will have shaped the emotional norm, which affects collective (e.g. national) identity and directs or sometimes distorts its further perception.

5.

The process of social consolidation can be interpreted by referring to the constructivist approach and the reflection of cultural historians who have developed concepts useful for gaining a better understanding of the “emotional landscape”.

⁹ A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, Munich 2006, pp. 51-54. Cf. also (in Polish) J. Assmann, *Pamięć kulturowa. Pismo, zapamiętywanie i polityczna tożsamość w cywilizacjach starożytnych*, transl. by A. Kryczyńska-Pham, Warsaw 2008.

¹⁰ See J. Michel, *Gouverner les mémoires; les politiques mémorielles en France*, Paris 2010, pp. 24-27.

¹¹ Also in June 1944, the villages of Distomo in Greece and Marzabotto in Italy suffered a similar fate.

Those deserving mention include William M. Reddy¹² and Barbara H. Rosenwein.¹³ Reddy, although initially indifferent to the constructivist approach, constructed almost all of his “theory of emotions” around the concept of emotives, i.e. performative elements of discourse (social and political) which refer to a given emotion. They function as social norms regulating the emotional culture:

Emotives are similar to performatives (and differ from constatives) in that emotives do things to the world. Emotives are themselves instruments for directly changing, building, hiding, intensifying emotions.¹⁴

Emotives allow the creation of what Reddy calls the “emotional regime” containing an element of political control over the social construction emerging from interaction. This control is exercised, in the language of constructivist theorists, by the *norm-entrepreneur*.¹⁵ Its role consists in influencing the structure of the emotional culture of a particular community. This, in turn, can be defined on the basis of Rosenwein’s assumptions, according to which there exist so-called *emotional communities*.

6.

Considering the theoretical reflections on the collective fear of Germany, it can be said that there are communities of fear functioning according to historically, socially but also politically shaped systems of norms, and together forming a culture of fear. In a given community, it may sometimes be necessary to uphold the norm for political reasons, for instance if the dominant norm is a key element of the legitimisation of power. Such conditions prevailed in the communist countries of Central Europe after 1945, especially in Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, where the fear of the Germans, in various shades and degrees,¹⁶ was systematically fuelled and used by the ruling socialist or workers’ parties to legitimise their own rule and to maintain the role of the major political force as well as extensive cooperation with the Soviet Union. Speaking of a different geographical area (France), a different era (the French Revolution) and different emotions, Reddy said that the emotional regime, which is not always introduced through socio-technical manipulation, seems to be an essential aspect of political stability. It is hard to imagine a community such as society without established and generally accepted norms relating to collective emotions. An emotional regime is defined by Reddy as follows:

¹² W. M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling. A Framework for the History of Emotions*, Cambridge 2001.

¹³ B. H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages*, Ithaca, N.Y.–London 2006.

¹⁴ W. M. Reddy, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

¹⁵ See e.g. M. Finnemore, K. Sikkink, *International Norm Dynamics and Political Change*, International Organization 52/4, 1998, pp. 887-917.

¹⁶ For post-war Poland see e.g. M. Zaremba, *Wielka Trwoga, Polska 1944-1947. Ludowa reakcja na kryzys*, Warsaw 2012, pp. 561-573.

The set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices and emotives that express and inculcate them; a necessary underpinning of any stable political regime.¹⁷

Despite a certain degree of stability, obvious changes in the emotional attitude towards Germany and the Germans could be observed. While the Cold War meant that the stages and purpose of these changes differed somewhat between Eastern and Western Europe, the basic process of changing of norms was common to them. From the viewpoint of a social theory of international relations, this was a change in norms resulting from the interaction between the actors (in the microstructure of their mutual relationship), and between them viewed as a system (microstructure) and an international system (macrostructure). In the latter case, the change is related to the integration of a norm prevailing in the relationships of other actors with the Germans, and primarily with the emotional regime followed by the majority of them.

It can be theoretically assumed that in the context of normative anarchy prevailing in the international system, an axiomatically binding emotional culture is absent as well. So if the statement “anarchy is what states make of it”¹⁸ is true, this definition can be applied to international emotional culture, but only if a certain difference is taken into account, namely that even in a given emotional regime, total emotional control is not entirely possible. There are other emotional options which Reddy called “emotional refuges”. Nevertheless, it seems that there are no ways of sanctioning an emotional norm as effective as in the case of norms concerning more rational aspects of mutual perception and contacts.

7.

In Europe, the culture of fear of Germany changed due to the emergence of other feelings in mutual relations of individual actors with Germany, which was reflected in the international macrostructure. **Trust** began to be an emotional norm from the 1970s onwards. This was the basis for a more positive approach to Germany, which is clearly reflected in the normalisation and reconciliation policies of individual countries. Initially, this was accompanied by some destabilisation, because the system functioning hitherto underwent an important normative change. The previous emotional state was in fact characterised by a higher or lower degree of distrust of Germany, but also a paradoxical stability of expectations in mutual relations. There existed some form of familiarity.¹⁹

¹⁷ W. M. Reddy, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

¹⁸ A. Wendt, *Anarchy is what states make of it. The social construction of power politics*, International Organization 46/2, 1992, pp. 391-425.

¹⁹ For the difference between *Vertrauen* and *Vertrautheit* see N. Luhmann, *Vertrauen. Ein Mechanismus der Reduktion sozialer Komplexität*, Stuttgart 2000, p. 22.

Due to internalisation, a new norm was gradually transforming the prevailing emotional regime with regard to Germany in many European countries. It is impossible to forget about the influence of the superpowers, i.e. the United States and the Soviet Union, especially in the first and most difficult phase of this transformation. Transformation of the emotional regime as a process of adopting a new fundamental norm proceeded according to the scheme proposed by A. Wendt, which includes three stages of internalisation:²⁰

- coercion: the actors comply with the norm under pressure, e.g. from another actor;
- self-interest: the actors apply the new norm because they consider it beneficial for themselves;
- legitimacy: the actors comply with the norm because they believe it to be justified.

Coercion was most noticeable during the Cold War, when the superpowers, each in its own way, put pressure on their allies to make them accept and cooperate with the Federal Republic of Germany or the German Democratic Republic. “Friendship” and “brotherhood” imposed/enforced top-down by the Soviet Union prevailed between Poland or Czechoslovakia and East Germany. However, there were also cases of exertion of pressure, though on a smaller scale, by the USA on Western European countries for military rapprochement with the Federal Republic of Germany within NATO.

Understanding of the benefits (self-interest) often coincided with the development of cooperation – for instance, for France, reconciliation with West Germany meant developing greater cooperation and ensuring a stronger position in Europe.

The third element was also present. Due to the stability achieved in the new emotional regime, good relations, or even support in the case of some actors, became a fully legitimised norm.

8.

The deeper the internalisation of a norm or the more stable and durable it turns out to be, the more difficult is the process of another normative change. To quote Niklas Luhmann, it is a system which can be described as “reproducing itself” (*autopoiesis*).²¹ This does not mean that this state will remain unchanged and irreversible. A transition from an emotional norm characterised by a strong culture of fear to a more positive norm cannot be perceived in teleological terms. Just like at the time of the emergence of a norm trying to eliminate the existing culture of fear of the Germans, reactivation of fear as a dominant emotional regime requires a suitably

²⁰ A. Wendt, *Social Theory...*, pp. 246-312.

²¹ N. Luhmann, *Soziale Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie*, Frankfurt a. Main 1984, p. 60.

strong stimulus. A norm-entrepreneur can be, for example, a politician trying to push through a new discourse with the intention of restoring the previous norm or updating it. The question arises as to whether and why the new or old-new norm will be able to prevail in the emotional culture. The following factors can be distinguished as decisive:

- (a) a low level of internalisation of the current dominant culture, which is not regarded (yet?) as an important, “natural” legitimising factor, but only as an imposed or temporarily advantageous norm;
- (b) reinforcement, in the perception of relations with Germany, of the stress-inducing factors associated with history to such an extent that they make possible the updating of the relevant aspects of pan-generational cultural memory (asymmetry, dominance, etc.);
- (c) difference between the microsystem of mutual relations of a given actor with Germany and the macrosystem of the dominating international emotional culture, e.g. because of the specific emotional regime of that actor;
- (d) general fearfulness in the emotional community (society), which triggers the political need to determine the source of stress, and to look for an external “scapegoat” in the case of instrumentalisation.

9.

The crisis of the European Union in the last five years has contributed to the re-domination of fearfulness in the emotional cultures of some countries, which was not always directly caused by or related to Germany. Financial, economic and social problems in Greece led to a political crisis, as a result of which a risk requiring government intervention in the emotional culture arose. In this case, Germany proved to be a reliable and convenient – through being externalised – source of stress, providing an opportunity for Greek politicians to divert attention from the internal situation in the country. The political declarations of Angela Merkel’s Germany could indeed revive old fears in the Greeks. Maybe so positive an emotional culture did not prevail in Greek–German relations as between Germany and other fellow EU members. Finally, there may be some discrepancy between the emotional regime of the political culture in Greece and the northern European “average”. Undoubtedly, the general state of social fearfulness caused by the crisis made it necessary to give a definition of fear. French historian Jean Delumeau, one of the first scholars to make a comprehensive analysis of this emotion in a social context, noted:

Since it is impossible to preserve one’s internal balance when confronted over a period with a floating anxiety which is infinite and unidentifiable, it is necessary for a person to transform it and to fragment it into specific fears. [...] It is this process that we find at the civilization level.²²

²² J. Delumeau, *La Peur en Occident (XIVe-XVIIIe siècles)*, Paris 1978, pp. 15-16.

The French example shows that the political attempts of norm-entrepreneurs are not necessarily doomed to success. Although the French emotional regime has recently undergone an apparent change towards a more negative (denying) approach to Germany, this is not the dominant trend.

Given the numerous critical reactions to the aforementioned statements of some French politicians, it can be noted that fear of the Germans cannot now be imposed as a norm of an emotional culture which could transform the emotional landscape of the French “emotional community”.

The answer to the question whether there will be a broader transformation of culture or emotional regime in relation to Germany or the Germans in the macrostructure of international relations in Europe will depend on the factors already mentioned and described, and also on the impulses that are sent out by Germany concerning both economic matters and other international issues in Europe. The EU’s relations with Russia, in the face of the tense situation prevailing in Ukraine since the autumn of 2013, will probably be one of them.

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Keywords: Germany, emotional culture, emotional regime, norm, change

ABSTRACT

Building upon A. K. Henrikson’s concept of mental mapping, the author proposes an interpretative framework to approach the European emotional landscape concerning Germany since 2010, when the symptoms of the European Union’s economic crisis became more visible. The main emotion considered here is fear in its broader sense. The analysis deals with collective emotions, seen as a stabilised cultural element in international relations. The question of change in the dominant emotional regime is treated from a constructivist perspective, as a norm change on the microsystemic level of the relations between given state agents and Germany, as well as on the macrosystemic scale of the international structure. Final remarks concern the reactivation of fear and its limits.